

The Influence of Consumers' Logical and Affective Brand Evaluation Inclinations on Consideration Set Composition

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how consumers' brand evaluation inclinations influence the degree of brand convergence in their consideration sets. We treated consumers' brand evaluation inclinations two-dimensionally (logical and affective) and divided consumers into the following four groups: (I) strong logical and affective brand evaluation inclination, (II) weak logical and strong affective brand evaluation inclination, (III) weak logical and affective brand evaluation inclination, and (IV) strong logical and weak affective brand evaluation inclination. We hypothesized that the degree of convergence would differ among the four groups and assumed, more concretely, that it would be highest in Group IV, moderate in Group I and Group III, and lowest in Group II. A series of experiments based on data gathered via questionnaires showed differences in the degrees of brand convergence among the four groups, which supports this study's primary hypothesis. However, the observed magnitude of the relationships differed from this study's supposition. The empirical results showed that the degrees of convergence for consumers in Group II and Group III were higher than those for consumers in Group I and Group IV.

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1. Introduction

Marketing literature suggests that consumers only consider a few brands before purchasing a product, to simplify their decision making process (Shocker, Ben-Akiva, Boccara, & Nedungadi, 1991). The set of brands that consumers consider purchasing is called a *consideration set* and has been frequently explored in previous research (for reviews, see Hauser, 2014; Roberts & Lattin, 1997).

An important issue with regard to the consideration set is its composition. A large body of academic literature has explored which brands tend to be included in a given consideration set. For instance, brands that consumers have been satisfied with in the past tend to be placed in their consideration sets (Lapersonne, Laurent, & Le Goff, 1995). Similarly, pioneering brands are more likely to be placed into consideration sets (Kardes, Kalyanaram, Chandrashekar, & Dornoff, 1993).

Although there have been a plethora of studies on consideration set composition, the degree of brand convergence in consumers' consideration sets remains to be seen (i.e., whether the brands included in the consideration set are the same or differ among consumers). While brands in the consideration set converge with consumers' preferred brands, these brands differ across consumers, based on their preferences and their evaluation behaviors. In this study, we propose that even in a single product category, differences will be observable across consumer groups. Namely, we assume that the degree of brand convergence in the consideration set of a certain consumer group will differ from the degree of brand convergence in the consideration set of another consumer group.

This study uses consumers' brand evaluation inclinations to classify them into four groups. Although it is well known that the consideration set composition depends on consumers'

brand evaluation inclinations (Hauser, 2014), it is not clear whether consumers who have the same brand evaluation procedure will include the same brands in their individual consideration sets. It is possible that the brands in any given consideration set could be different, even if the consumers' brand evaluation inclinations are the same.

These brand evaluation inclinations can be classified in various ways; this study focuses on logical and affective brand evaluation inclinations. According to previous literature, the logical brand evaluation inclination indicates that consumers attach more value to logical (utilitarian) dimensions, such as performance, whereas the affective brand evaluation inclination indicates that consumers attach more value to affective (hedonic or sensory) dimensions, such as color or design (e.g., Chitturi, Raghunathan, & Mahajan, 2007, 2008; Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Kivetz & Simonson, 2002; Mittal, 1988; Miura & Ito, 2000; Okada, 2005; Pham & Avnet, 2004; Ratchford, 1987; Vaughn, 1980; Voss, Spangenberg, & Grohmann, 2003; Zajonc & Markus, 1982). Whether these brand evaluation inclinations lead to brand convergence or divergence in consumers' consideration sets remains to be defined. The purpose of this study is to clarify and answer that question.

To answer this research question, this study does not combine logical brand evaluation inclinations and affective brand evaluation inclinations into a single dimension, because it can be assumed that a number of consumers evaluate brands both logically and affectively, while others evaluate brands neither logically nor affectively (Miura & Ito, 2000). If the logical and affective brand evaluation inclinations were combined into one dimension, the two groups would probably be evaluated as a singular brand evaluation inclination, although it may be worthwhile to distinguish these two groups and to compare them

empirically. Hence, we adopted the idea that logical and affective brand evaluation inclinations may be compatible and, therefore, treated consumers' brand evaluation inclinations two-dimensionally. From this standpoint, we classify consumers into four groups in accordance with their tendencies to evaluate brands from a logical perspective and/or from an affective perspective. We then assessed the degree of brand convergence in the consideration sets of each group and compared them. Through this exploration, we will deduce how logical and affective brand evaluation inclinations influence consideration set composition.

2. Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

It is assumed in this study that the influence of logical brand evaluation on consideration set composition is different to the effect of affective brand evaluation. While one of these inclinations may lead to brand convergence in many consumers' consideration sets, the other may lead to divergence.

First, we consider the role of logical brand evaluation. As mentioned above, logical brand evaluation is based on the functionality of the brand. The important element to consider here is that attributes, such as functionality or performance, have objective evaluation criteria of superiority (Miura & Ito, 2000). Taking automobile gas mileage as an example, 20 kilometers per liter is objectively superior to 15 kilometers per liter. Based on such attributes, consumers are able to evaluate the quality of each brand and thereby formulate a clear brand ranking. Because this brand ranking is based on objective evaluation criteria, brands that are highly rated may converge with ones that are preferred among consumers. Returning to the gas mileage example, it is obvious that each consumer prefers the car that offers 20 kilometers per liter over the car that offers 15 kilometers per liter, holding

everything else equal. Hence, logical brand evaluation may lead to the convergence of particular brands in consumers' consideration sets.

On the other hand, we assume that affective brand evaluation may lead to brand divergence in consumers' consideration sets. Affective brand evaluation is based on affective or sensory attributes. In contrast to attributes like functionality or performance, affective attributes have no superior objective evaluation criteria (Miura & Ito, 2000). For instance, while gas mileage (logical attribute) can be evaluated objectively, the car's body color (affective attribute) is not an objective attribute. Red cars are objectively neither superior nor inferior to cars in other colors (i.e., one consumer may prefer to a red car, while another may prefer a blue car). In fact, attributes such as color can be evaluated based only on consumer preference. That is, each consumer can only evaluate affective attributes subjectively. It is clear that the preferences for such attributes vary among consumers because these preferences reflect the values of each consumer. In fact, previous research suggests that assigning value to subjectively-evaluated criteria leads to behavioral diversity (Miura & Ito, 2000). Hence, we conclude that affective brand evaluation leads to brand divergence in consumers' consideration sets.

If logical and affective brand evaluation inclinations are compatible, how can these two-dimensional consumers' brand evaluation inclinations influence consideration set composition? To tackle this issue, we divided consumers into the following four groups by their brand evaluation tendencies: (I) strong logical and strong affective brand evaluation group, (II) weak logical and strong affective brand evaluation group, (III) weak logical and weak affective brand evaluation group, and (IV) strong logical and weak affective brand evaluation group (see Table 1). In the following sections, we will summarize each group's

brand evaluation characteristics and the influence of these traits on consideration set composition.

Table 1

Classification of consumers' brand evaluation inclinations

Group II logical inclination: weak affective inclination: strong	Group I logical inclination: strong affective inclination: strong
Group III logical inclination: weak affective inclination: weak	Group IV logical inclination: strong affective inclination: weak

First, we consider the consumers who tend to evaluate brands both logically and affectively (Group I). On the one hand, these consumers evaluate brands logically and formulate a clear brand ranking based on functionality and performance. Because this ranking reflects objective attributes, the brands in the consideration set will partly converge with the consumers' preferred brands. Alternatively, affective brand evaluation exerts the opposite influence on consideration set composition. By evaluating brands based on one's subjective preferences, the brands in the consideration set will be more diverse. While logical brand evaluation leads to the convergence of particular brands in consumers' consideration sets, affective brand evaluation reflects the divergence of consumers' subjective preferences so that the brands in the consideration set become more diverse. Hence, any brand convergence introduced from the use of logical brand evaluation and any divergence from affective brand evaluation may cancel each other out. In sum, the degree of brand convergence in the consideration sets of consumers with strong logical and strong affective brand evaluation inclinations will be moderate.

Secondly, we consider those consumers who evaluate brands affectively (Group II). Because these consumers pay little attention to objective attributes, they do not typically create a clear brand ranking based on objective criteria. However, by evaluating brands on the basis of their affective attributes, they formulate a subjective brand ranking, which reflects their values. Because it is clear that the subjective preferences of each consumer vary, the brand ranking that consumers formulate based on affective attributes is also diverse. In sum, the consumers who are classified into this group have weak logical tendencies and strong affective inclinations, which lead to brand divergence in their consideration sets. As a result, we assume that brand divergence in the consideration sets of these consumers will be the highest of the four brand evaluation groups (i.e., the degree of brand convergence in the consideration sets of these consumers will be the lowest among the four brand evaluation groups).

Third, we consider those consumers who tend to evaluate brands neither logically nor affectively (Group III). By definition, these consumers tend to evaluate brands without reflection. That is, they are less likely to filter the brands they consider purchasing based on objective criteria, meaning that brand convergence in their consideration sets may not be salient. In contrast to the consumers in Group II, however, brand divergence in these consumers' consideration sets will also not be salient because the consumers in Group III have weaker affective brand evaluation tendencies. Therefore, the weak convergence and divergence levels of these consumers may cancel each other out. For these consumers, the degree of brand convergence in the consideration sets will moderate itself.

Lastly, we consider the consumers who tend to evaluate brands logically (Group IV). They are likely to attach much more value to attributes that have an objective criterion of

superiority, and will formulate a clear brand ranking based on objective criteria. In contrast, they pay little attention to affective attributes. It can be assumed that these consumers prefer the brands with the best functionality. Because the best brands in terms of functionality can be detected based on objective attributes, the highly rated brands will converge with the consumers' preferred brands. Alternatively, since affective attributes exert little influence on their evaluation by such consumers, the consideration set composition will not reflect the subjective values of each consumer, meaning that the brands in the consideration set will not become diverse. In sum, the consumers who are classified into this group have a strong tendency that leads toward brand convergence in the consideration set. As a result, we assume that brand convergence in the consideration sets of these consumers will be the highest of the four brand evaluation groups.

Consumers in Group II tend to evaluate brands based on their variable, subjective preferences, resulting in more brand diversity in their consideration sets. In contrast, consumers in Group IV are more likely to include the functionally superior brands into their consideration sets. Because the advantages of these brands are based on objective criteria, the brands in these consideration sets will converge with the preferred brands the most across the four groups in this study. Regarding consumers in Group I and Group III, we assume that there is little difference in the degree of brand convergence in the consideration sets of these consumers. For consumers in Group I, strong logical brand evaluation inclinations and strong affective brand evaluation inclinations will cancel out, meaning that the degree of brand convergence in the consideration sets of these consumers will be self-moderating. For consumers in Group III, weak logical brand evaluation inclinations and weak affective brand evaluation inclinations will also cancel out, resulting in a moderate level of brand convergence in the consideration sets of these consumers.

Given the aforementioned considerations, we hypothesize that the degree of brand convergence in the consideration sets among consumers differs across the four groups. To be more precise, we assume that the highest degree of convergence will be observed for consumers in Group IV, a moderate degree of convergence will be seen in Group I and Group III, and the lowest degree of convergence will be observed for consumers in Group II.

3. Empirical Study

Data Collection and Participants

To test our hypotheses, questionnaire surveys were distributed in July 2010 at a university in Tokyo. The surveys measured the brand evaluation inclinations and the consideration set composition of each participant. With regard to the product categories tested, we selected laptop computers, digital cameras, chocolates, and sneakers. After collecting the data, we excluded participants who did not categorize any brands into their consideration set. The conclusive sample sizes are 367 (laptop computers), 345 (digital cameras), 382 (chocolates), and 319 (sneakers).

Brand Evaluation

We utilized the following procedure for each product category. First, using Miura and Ito (2000) and Ratchford (1987) as references, brand evaluation inclinations were measured using four questions: “When buying this product, I compare the quality and functions of the various brands” and “When buying this product, I consider the product’s usage features and price” to test logical brand evaluation behavior; and “When buying this product, I viscerally choose the brands based on my feelings” and “When buying this product, I place importance on color and design” to test affective brand evaluation behavior (Miura & Ito,

2000, p. 223; Ratchford, 1987, p. 29). Participants then responded to the questions on a five-point scale from “Agree” (5) to “Disagree” (1). Then, we conducted a factor analysis, which was set to extract two factors (logical and affective brand evaluation inclinations), and calculated the factor scores (for results of the factor analyses, see Appendix). Subsequently, we calculated the average of the factor scores for logical brand evaluation and divided each participant into two categories: ‘strong logical brand evaluation inclination’ (when the participant’s factor score was above average), and ‘weak logical brand evaluation inclination’ (when the participant’s factor score was below average). The same procedure was used to classify participants on affective brand evaluation. Based on these classifications, we assigned each participant to groups of a 2 (strong logical brand evaluation inclination or weak logical brand evaluation inclination) \times 2 (strong affective brand evaluation inclination or weak affective brand evaluation inclination) between-subjects design (see Table 1).

Consideration Set Composition

The consideration set composition was measured by the recognition method and by asking the participants: “Which brands do you want to buy?” Fifteen brands were listed in the questionnaire in each product category. Then, using Andrews and Srinivasan (1995) as a reference, an index of the degree of brand convergence in the consideration set was calculated for each participant as follows:

$$(1) \quad P(C) = \frac{\prod_{i \in C} D_i \prod_{i \notin C} (1 - D_i)}{1 - \prod_i (1 - D_i)},$$

where D_i indicates the frequency that brand i was categorized into the consideration set in each brand evaluation group (I, II, III, and IV), and can be calculated by taking the number

of participants in each brand evaluation group who categorized brand i into their consideration set and dividing it by the total number of participants in the brand evaluation group. Thus, each D_i ranges from 0 to 1. The calculated $P(C)$ also ranges from 0 to 1, and an index that is close to 1 indicates that the same brands are categorized into the consideration set among participants in the same brand evaluation group.

We compared this index among the four brand evaluation groups using a Kruskal-Wallis test in conjunction with multiple comparisons (Steel-Dwass test). We assume that the indices differ among the four groups and, in particular, that the magnitude relationship is $P(C)_{IV} > P(C)_I = P(C)_{III} > P(C)_{II}$.

Results and Discussion

As shown in Table 2, the degree of brand convergence in participants' consideration sets differs significantly across the four groups for each product category. It was therefore confirmed that the consumers' brand evaluation inclinations do indeed influence consideration set composition.

Table 2

Differences of consideration set composition among the four groups

	I		II		III		IV		<i>chi-square</i>	<i>p-value</i>
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median		
Laptop computers	.023 (<i>n</i> = 106)	.021	.051 (<i>n</i> = 100)	.036	.035 (<i>n</i> = 67)	.035	.022 (<i>n</i> = 94)	.017	32.68	< .001
Digital cameras	.028 (<i>n</i> = 133)	.015	.046 (<i>n</i> = 72)	.035	.073 (<i>n</i> = 52)	.106	.025 (<i>n</i> = 88)	.016	35.59	< .001
Chocolates	.001 (<i>n</i> = 123)	.001	.002 (<i>n</i> = 96)	.002	.003 (<i>n</i> = 92)	.003	.002 (<i>n</i> = 71)	.002	21.27	< .001
Sneakers	.070 (<i>n</i> = 111)	.040	.072 (<i>n</i> = 89)	.053	.097 (<i>n</i> = 79)	.049	.085 (<i>n</i> = 40)	.030	6.81	.078

Note: The larger values indicate that the degree of brand convergence in participants' consideration sets is high.

However, the observed magnitude of the relationships, based on the median, deviates from this study's initial supposition. For the multiple comparisons, the results of the Steel-Dwass test for laptop computers indicate that four of six comparisons were significant (I vs. II: $t = 4.65$, $p < .001$; I vs. III: $t = 2.67$, $p = .039$; I vs. IV: $t = 0.45$, $p > .1$; II vs. III: $t = 1.77$, $p > .1$; II vs. IV: $t = 4.81$, $p < .001$; III vs. IV: $t = 2.79$, $p = .027$). Furthermore, similar results were found from the tests for digital cameras (I vs. II: $t = 3.26$, $p = .006$; I vs. III: $t = 4.93$, $p < .001$; I vs. IV: $t = 0.32$, $p > .1$; II vs. III: $t = 2.67$, $p = .038$; II vs. IV: $t = 3.33$, $p = .005$; III vs. IV: $t = 4.62$, $p < .001$), and for chocolates (I vs. II: $t = 3.09$, $p = .011$; I vs. III: $t = 4.03$, $p < .001$; I vs. IV: $t = 1.63$, $p > .1$; II vs. III: $t = 2.10$, $p > .1$; II vs. IV: $t = 1.36$, $p > .1$; III vs. IV: $t = 2.49$, $p = .062$). For sneakers, only one of the six comparisons was significant (I vs. II: $t = 1.11$, $p > .1$; I vs. III: $t = 2.46$, $p = .066$; I vs. IV: $t = 1.01$, $p > .1$; II vs. III: $t = 2.05$, p

$> .1$; II vs. IV: $t = 0.73$, $p > .1$; III vs. IV: $t = 0.24$, $p > .1$). We assumed that the degree of brand convergence in Group II's consideration sets would be the lowest among the four groups, and that the degree of brand convergence in the consideration sets of consumers in Group III would stand at a moderate level. However, the results indicate that the degree of convergence for these consumers is higher than that of consumers who have strong logical brand evaluation tendencies (Group I and Group IV).

How can these results be interpreted? First, for consumers in Group II, fashion trends might influence their consideration set composition. It might be important to consider that fashion trends are more likely to influence consumers' responses to affective attributes due to the lack of objective criteria (Miura & Ito, 2000), and may lead to the brand convergence in consumers' consideration sets. Using automobiles as an example again, if a body color of red came into fashion, the brands that consumers put into their consideration sets may converge with their interest in red automobiles. Since affective attributes influence the consideration set composition of consumers in Group II most prominently, it can be assumed that these consumers are more likely to be sensitive to fashion trends. Hence, if a fashion phenomenon occurs, consumers in Group II will perceive it and therefore their preferences will converge with particular objectives (e.g., trendy color). By evaluating brands based on these homogenous preferences, these consumers place the brands that fit these preferences into their consideration sets. As a result, the brands that are placed in the consideration set converge with 'trendy' ones.

However, it should be noted that because fashion phenomena are not based on objective superiority criteria (i.e., red automobiles are not objectively superior to cars with other body colors), this tendency may only be observed for a limited period of time (Solomon,

2011). That is, although preferred brands may converge with ‘trendy’ ones in the short term, these brands will not be favored after the fashion trend comes to an end. Subsequently, if a new fashion phenomenon occurs, the other brands that fit the new trend may be intensively categorized into consumers’ consideration sets. While those brands that are intensively integrated into consumers’ consideration sets based on trends are only there for a short period of time, preferred brands are included into consumers’ consideration sets continually.

Secondly, to interpret the results for consumers in Group III, we consider the type of consumers who comprise this group and how they formulate their consideration sets. Using Miura and Ito (2000) as a reference, we can assume that they are not generally interested in the corresponding product category. Because such consumers are typically not motivated to actively search for brand information, they have limited brand awareness and knowledge (Brisoux & Chéron, 1990). These consumers are more likely to be aware of those brands with the highest market share because they are more frequently exposed to these brands through advertising and other means. Furthermore, because of a lack of motivation on the part of these consumers to search for information, it is less likely that they are aware of ‘low-profile’ brands. It can be assumed that the brands that these consumers are aware of are skewed in favor of particularly well-recognized ones. In light of investigations suggesting that such consumers do not tend to evaluate brands in detail (Celsi & Olson, 1988), it is likely that they directly include the brands that they know into their consideration sets without detailed evaluation. As a result, the brands in their consideration sets will converge with the particularly well-known ones.

Therefore, we would interpret the reason for the diversion in our results as follows. A

fashion phenomenon (consumers in Group II) and a simplified brand evaluation tendency of relying on well-known brands (consumers in Group III) could lead to the convergence of particular brands in the consideration sets of these consumers. As a result, these consumers include the same brands into their consideration sets, as compared to consumers in Group I and Group IV. Verifying this interpretation would be an interesting topic for future research.

4. Conclusion

The objective of this study was to explore how consumers' brand evaluation inclinations influence consideration set composition. We divided consumers into four brand evaluation groups based on logical and affective brand evaluation tendencies and investigated whether the degree of brand convergence in the consumers' consideration sets differed across the four groups. Although the empirical results show that consumers with weak logical brand evaluation tendencies tended to integrate the same brands into their consideration sets, in contrast to this study's hypothesis, it was confirmed that the degree of brand convergence in these consumers' consideration sets differed among the four groups. From these results, we can conclude that the degree of brand convergence in the consumers' consideration sets is dependent on consumers' logical and affective brand evaluation inclinations. The contribution of this study is that it presented the results empirically.

This research has implications for marketers in terms of apportioning the number of brands offered to consumers based on the degree of brand convergence in consumers' consideration sets. Offering a wide variety of brands would be appropriate to target consumers in Group I and Group IV. Since they tend to formulate relatively brand-diverse consideration sets, offering only a few brands would seem to be insufficient. Alternatively,

narrowing down the brand offerings might be efficient to target consumers in Group II and Group III. Because these consumers are likely to categorize the same brands into their consideration sets, it is not necessarily important to offer a wide variety of brands to them. In either case, it is indisputable that marketers should pay attention to the preferences of the consumers in each group.

The findings of this research can be most appropriately utilized when considering the study's limitations. First, although the results show that logical and affective brand evaluation inclinations influence the degree of brand convergence in consumers' consideration sets, the observed magnitude of the relationships based on the median differ from the initial hypotheses. As a possible interpretation of this result, we pointed out the influence of fashion trends on consumers in Group II and simplified consideration set formulation tendencies for consumers in Group III. However, an empirical verification of this interpretation has not yet been completed. Secondly, the results of the four product categories resemble one another, but are not completely identical. It may indicate that the effects of logical and affective brand evaluation on consideration set composition are not robust over different product categories. However, cogent analyses in this regard were not conducted in this study. Furthermore, the participants of this study were nearly all students, a fact that indicates some sampling bias. Therefore, one should be careful in generalizing the results of this study. Further investigations, taking these limitations into consideration, should be conducted in the future.

5. Appendix

Table A1

Factor loadings and communalities based on a factor analysis with varimax rotation for four items

	Laptop computers			Digital cameras		
	Logical	Affective	Communality	Logical	Affective	Communality
Item 1	.803	-.051	.647	.900	.201	.851
Item 2	.619	.015	.384	.853	.228	.779
Item 3	-.114	.732	.549	.137	.742	.570
Item 4	.073	.662	.444	.234	.734	.593
Eigenvalues	1.046	0.978		1.611	1.181	
Total variance	26.154	24.445		40.287	29.537	
Percentage of total variance	26.154	50.599		40.287	69.824	

	Chocolates			Sneakers		
	Logical	Affective	Communality	Logical	Affective	Communality
Item 1	.728	.122	.545	.688	.113	.486
Item 2	.649	.203	.463	.679	.340	.577
Item 3	.105	.692	.491	.106	.666	.455
Item 4	.216	.636	.451	.383	.668	.594
Eigenvalues	1.009	0.940		1.092	1.019	
Total variance	25.231	23.497		27.304	25.481	
Percentage of total variance	25.231	48.728		27.304	52.784	

Item 1 (logical): When buying this product, I compare the quality and functions of the various brands.

Item 2 (logical): When buying this product, I consider the product's usage features and price.

Item 3 (affective): When buying this product, I viscerally choose the brands based on my feelings.

Item 4 (affective): When buying this product, I place importance on color and design.

Table A2

Cronbach's alphas

	Laptop computers	Digital cameras	Chocolates	Sneakers
Logical	.661	.897	.664	.668
Affective	.644	.724	.633	.634

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